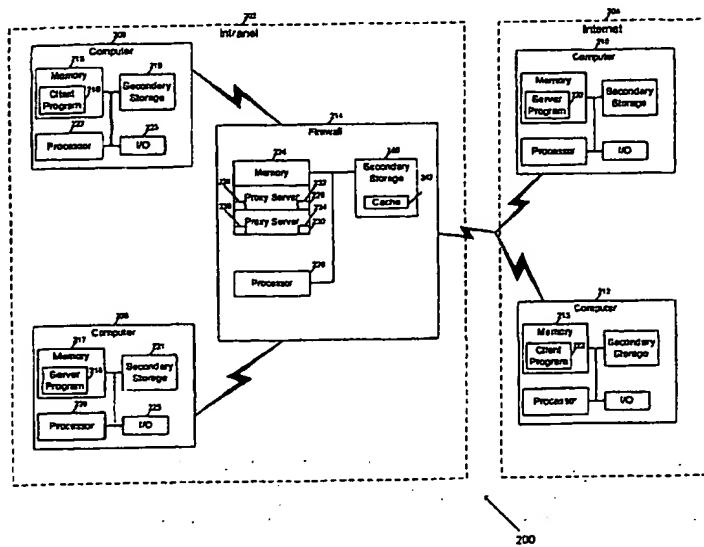




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(54) Title: SCALABLE PROXY SERVERS WITH PLUG IN FILTERS



(57) Abstract

A proxy server operative to accept plug-in filters to perform forward and reverse filtering between a client process and a server process. In accordance with one aspect of the invention, a method of filtering information includes the steps of receiving a request by the proxy server from a client. The proxy server identifies a Uniform Resource Locator (URL) of a server process in the request and compares that URL against filter rules previously defined to the system. In the event the URL satisfies one of the filter rules, a filter servlet associated with the satisfied filter rule is used to filter the requested information. A filter servlet is a set of instructions that, when executed, filters the information. The filtered request is then used to retrieve information from a server process. Similarly, the same filtering process may be performed on a response from the server process destined for a client process.

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SCALABLE PROXY SERVERS WITH PLUG IN FILTERS

RELATED APPLICATIONS

5 The present application claims priority from a Provisional Application, application number 60/089,995 filed June 19, 1998.

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

This invention relates to filtering information transmitted between a client and a server process and, more particularly, to using a proxy server and plug-in filters to filter information transmitted between a client process and a web server.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

The proliferation of the Internet has significantly increased the amount of information that businesses and consumers can access. Managing the influx of information is becoming increasingly important because there is some information that users wish to either not share with others on the Internet or would prefer that others not send them. By attaching a computer or a network to the Internet, users can search, access and download all types of information ranging from secure business or government information to information related to entertainment. Because of the few controls on the Internet, access to various types of information has increased drastically. There are, however, instances when users would like to filter out information retrieved from the network. For example, a business or government agency may not want security or sensitive information leaving their domain, e.g., local network. In addition, some information received from the Internet may not be operable in the format it was received. For example, the display resolution characteristics for a document received from the Internet may be different than that supported by the user receiving the document.

To address these concerns, systems have been developed to prevent some information from passing into and out of a domain. These systems filter information, but are complex and not easily tailored to a specific business. Generally, once the software developer writes a system that performs any filtering of information, what is

filtered or how it is filtered cannot be modified except by having the software developer create a whole new filtering system. The problem with this approach is that many businesses and consumers have specific, and changing, needs of what and how to filter various information, and it may not be feasible to have a software developer rebuild the system every time the user desires different content to be filtered.

Furthermore, there currently are no systems that allow for the modification of the data to make information, inoperative when first received, operative in the user's environment.

By using the Internet, and specifically the World Wide Web ("Web"), the ability to interface with computers is simplified. The architecture of the web follows conventional client-server model. The term "client" and "server" are used to refer to a computer's general role as a requester of data (the client) or provider of data (the server). Under the Web environment, Web browsers reside in the client and specially formatted "Web documents" reside on Internet Web servers. Web clients and Web servers typically communicate using the protocol called "hypertext transferred protocol" (HTTP).

In operation, a browser opens the connection to the server and initiates a request for a document. The server delivers the requested document, typically in the form coded in a standard "hypertext markup language" (HTML) format. After the document is delivered, the connection is closed. The browser displays the document and performs a function designated by the document.

Therefore it is desirable to improve the filtering of information.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

Methods, systems and articles of manufacture consistent with the present invention overcome the shortcomings of existing systems for filtering information between a client process and a server process by providing a proxy server with plug-in filters. The proxy server with plug-in filters allows for easy modification of what information to filter and how to filter it. In addition, the use of plug-in filters allow for the modification of information beyond removing content of the information, but also modifying the characteristics of the information to correspond with the client or

server processes environments.

In accordance with one aspect of the present invention, as embodied and broadly described herein, a method of filtering information from a first process to a second process, comprises the steps of receiving the information from the first process, selecting a filter to apply to the information received by the first process, applying the filter to the information by modifying the information based on instructions contained in the filter, and transmitting the modified information to the second process. The first process may be a client process, the information a request and the second process a server process. The information contained in the request may be security information. Alternatively, the first process may be a server process, the second process a client process, the information is a response and the modified information is a modified response. In addition, the filtered response may be cached. The step of selecting a filter to apply to the information may comprise the steps of defining a Uniform Resource Locator (URL) and an associated filter, retrieving a URL from the information, and in the event the defined URL matches the retrieved URL, selecting the filter associated with the defined URL to apply to the information.

In accordance with yet another aspect of the invention, as embodied and broadly described herein, a method of filtering information using a proxy server comprises the steps of receiving a request from a client process, applying a forward filter to the request, transmitting the filtered request to a server process, receiving a response from the server process related to the filtered request, applying a reverse filter to the response, and transmitting the filtered response to the client. The second process may be a Web server, in which case the step of applying the forward filter may comprise the steps of defining a URL and an associated filter, and filtering the request using the associated filter in the event the defined URL is contained in the request. Also when the second process is a Web server, the step of applying the reverse filter may comprise the steps of defining a URL and an associated filter, and filtering the request using the associated filter in the event the defined URL is contained in the response. The filtered response may be cached.

30 In accordance with yet another aspect of the invention, as embodied and

broadly described herein, a method of adding filters to a proxy server comprises the steps of creating the proxy server operative to receive filters, creating a filter having a filter rule and a filter servlet, adding the filter to the proxy server, wherein the proxy server is operative to modify information using the added filter. Multiple filters may
5 be added to the proxy server.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

The accompanying drawings, which are incorporated in and constitute a part of this specification, illustrate an implementation of the invention and, together with the description, serve to explain the advantages and principles of the invention. In
10 the drawings,

FIG. 1 shows a computer network containing a client and a server system;

FIG. 2 depicts a data process system suitable for practicing methods and systems consistent with the present invention;

FIG. 3 depicts the components of a proxy server architecture used to filter
15 information in a manner consistent with an exemplary embodiment of present invention;

FIG. 4 depicts a flow chart of the high level steps involved with practicing forward and reverse filtering in a manner consistent with an exemplary embodiment of the present invention;

20 FIG. 5 depicts a flow chart depicting the steps to filter a request or a response in a manner consistent with an exemplary embodiment of the present invention; and

FIG. 6 depicts a flow chart depicting the steps required to add a filter to a proxy server in a manner consistent with an exemplary embodiment of the present invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENT

Reference will now be made in detail to an implementation consistent with the present invention as illustrated in the accompanying drawings. Wherever possible, the same reference numbers will be used throughout the drawings and the following description to refer to the same or like parts.

Introduction

Systems and methods consistent with the present invention use plug-in filters for forward and reverse filtering of information transmitted between a client process and a server process. A proxy server interfaces with the server process and the client process and monitors the requests and responses that are transmitted between them.

The system and method described herein allow users to create filters and define them into the proxy server thereby allowing the user to tailor what and how information gets filtered. These plug-in filters modify the information between the client process and the server process in some manner. The modification may be content based, such as to remove security information, or other modification, such as changing the information transmitted from the server process so that it is operable and compatible in the client process, e.g., changing display resolution characteristics.

In more detail, a proxy server is interfaced with the client and server processes. A filter is created and plugged into the proxy server. A filter comprises a filter rule and a filter servlet. The filter rule defines what is to be filtered. For example, a Uniform Resource Locator (URL) for requests can be defined as a filter rule, and consequently, any information requested by the client process to the defined URL will have a filter applied to it. The filter servlet is the actual instructions, that when executed, modify the information contained in the request or response. Therefore, using the previous example, once the request has been flagged as requiring filtering, by matching the defined URL, the filter servlet associated with the filter rule will be executed to modify the information in the request in some manner.

Methods and systems consistent with the present invention also supports the addition of multiple plug-in filters. By adding filters, the user can make multiple changes to what and how information is filtered. Furthermore, such methods and systems can also be configured to handle administrative tasks associated with the transmission of requests and responses between client and server processes. Caching also may be performed to speed access for multiple requests for the same information. When caching is implemented, it is preferable that the filtered response be cached in order that the filter does not need to be applied again to the response received from the

server process.

Figure 1 shows, in more detail, an example of a client-server system interconnected through a network 100. In this example, a remote server system 122 is interconnected through network 100 to client system 120. Client system 120 includes conventional components such as a processor 124, memory 125 (e.g. RAM), a bus 126 which couples processor 124 and memory 125, a mass storage device 127 (e.g. a magnetic hard disk or an optical storage disk) coupled to processor 124 and memory 125 through an I/O controller 128 and a network interface 129, such as a conventional modem.

Server system 122 also includes conventional components such as a processor 134, memory 135 (e.g. RAM), a bus 136 which couples processor 134 and memory 135, a mass storage device 137 (e.g. a magnetic or optical disk) coupled to processor 134 and memory 135 through an I/O controller 138 and a network interface 139, such as a conventional modem. It will be appreciated from the description below that the present invention may be implemented in software which is stored as executable instructions on a computer readable medium on the client and server systems, such as mass storage devices 127 and 137 respectively, or in memories 125 and 135 respectively.

While the network described with respect to Fig. 1 reference a network, it will be recognized by one skilled in the art that the network may be any topology, including the Internet, private networks and internal computer structures, that allows either various computer systems or modules within a single computer system to exchange information.

FIG. 2 depicts a data processing system suitable for practicing methods and systems consistent with the present invention. Data processing system 200 comprises Intranet 202 and Internet 204. Intranet 202 reflects the network of an organization, and it contains computer 206, computer 208, and firewall 214. Firewall 214 monitors both inbound traffic to Intranet 202 and outbound traffic to Internet 204. Computer 206 and computer 208 each have a number of components, including memory 215, 217; secondary storage devices 219, 221; at least one I/O device 223, 225; and

processors 227, 229. Internet 204 contains computers 210, 212 having similar components to computers 206 and 208. Although Intranet 202 and Internet 204 are depicted as only having two computers, one skilled in the art will appreciate that these networks may have many more computers. Furthermore, one skilled in the art will 5 recognize that methods and systems consistent with the present invention may be used in conjunction with other local-area or wide-area networks. Additionally, computers 206, 208, 210, and 212 may contain additional or different components.

Firewall 214 contains a memory 224, a processor 226, and a secondary storage device 240. Memory 224 contains proxy server 228 and proxy server 230 in 10 accordance with methods and systems consistent with the present invention. Proxy servers 228 and 230 each contain a filter 232, 234. By using filter 232, proxy server 228 performs forward filtering. "Forward filtering" refers to the proxy server filtering requests originating from within Intranet 202 that are destined for Internet 204 as well as responses to these requests. For example, client program 216 on computer 206 15 may attempt to access a server program 220 on computer 210. In this situation, filter 232 indicates the outbound requests and the inbound responses that are allowed to flow through the firewall as well as any portions of the requests or responses that should be blocked. That is, the filtering performed by methods and systems consistent with the present invention includes blocking portions of a web site from being 20 accessed or blocking the entire web site from being accessed.

By using filter 234, proxy server 230 can perform reverse filtering. "Reverse filtering" refers to the proxy server filtering requests originating from Internet 204 that are destined for Intranet 202 as well as the responses to these requests. For example, a client program 222 on computer 212 may attempt to access a server program 218 on 25 computer 208. In this situation, proxy server 230 utilizes filter 234 to determine which requests and responses are allowed to pass through in their entirety and which may be allowed but only after modification.

In addition to filters 232, 234, the proxy servers may contain a servlet 236, 238, which is code that allows the proxy server to communicate utilizing any of a 30 number of well-known protocols, such as the hypertext transfer protocol (HTTP). It

should be appreciated that in accordance with methods and systems consistent with the present invention, a single proxy server may be configured to perform both forward filtering and reverse filtering. Also, the proxy server may be located on other devices besides firewall 214, such as a computer. Although aspects of the present invention are described as being stored in memory, those skilled in the art will appreciate that these aspects may also be stored on or read from other computer-readable media, such as hard disks, floppy disks, CD-ROM, a carrier wave from a network like the Internet, or other forms of RAM or ROM.

Another aspect of the proxy server consistent with methods and systems consistent with the present invention is that it caches data into a cache 242 of the firewall 214 after it is retrieved from a remote location via a request. Thus, all subsequent requests for the data are satisfied by using the locally stored copy of the data instead of incurring communication overhead. The version of the data cached is the filtered version. Therefore, if the filter (e.g. filter 234) removed content from the data, it is this modified version that gets cached. The data is cached in a protocol-independent manner. That is, regardless of the protocol used (e.g., HTTP or FTP) to access the data, the data is stored in cache 242. Accordingly, cache 242 may contain data accessed by using different protocols. Although methods and systems consistent with the present invention have been described as caching data on a secondary storage device, an alternative embodiment caches the data in memory 224.

Fig. 3 is a pictorial diagram of the proxy server architecture used to filter information in a manner consistent with the exemplary embodiment of the present invention. In one embodiment of the present invention, the components of the proxy server 300 include a request filter 310 containing filter rules, a response filter 320 also containing filter rules and a proxy server processing component 315. The proxy server interfaces with a client process 305, which desires information from the server process 325. The client can be any computer connected to the network or directly connected to the server 325. Typically, the client generates requests to send to the server and receives responses back from the server that satisfy the request.

The proxy server 300 is logically between the client process 305 and the server

process 325 and may be contained within a business's firewall. Within the proxy server, the request filter 310 receives requests sent by the client requesting information from the server. The request filter 310 analyzes the request and determines if any of the information in the request is subject to a filter defined in the 5 proxy server processing area 315. This analysis is performed by the use of filter rules. Filter rules define what should be filtered. In one embodiment, filter rules include Uniform Resource Locators (URLs). Therefore when a request is received, the URL is checked against the filter rules to determine whether this request is one that should be filtered. Checking for URLs can be done in any manner recognized by those 10 skilled in the art, such as including the filter rules in a table, database or creating a regular expression and comparing the URLs against the created regular expression.

In the event that the request needs to be filtered, i.e., it satisfies one of the filter rules, the request is passed on to the proxy server processing 315 to modify any 15 information in the request as defined by a filter servlet. A filter servlet contains the instructions, that when executed, perform the modification to the request. It is the servlet, for example, that instructs the proxy server to remove any security information from the request prior to sending the request to the server process.

The server generates a response to the request to be sent back to the client 305. In one embodiment of the present invention, the response is not sent directly to the 20 client but, however, is sent to the proxy server 300 and received by the response filter 320. Similarly, as with the request filter rule, the response filter rule checks the response to determine whether the response should be filtered prior to sending it to the client process. The response may be filtered to remove objectionable information 25 from being passed to the client or may be modified so that the information will work in the client process's environment, such as modifying the display resolution characteristics defined by a server process but incompatible to the client process.

In the event that the response satisfies one of the response filter rules, the proxy server applies one of the filter servlets associated with the satisfied filter rule to the response. It should be recognized by those skilled in the art that the proxy server 30 need not perform both request and response filtering simultaneously. The proxy

server may only process requests or only responses. The determination of what and how to filter is defined by the user.

The proxy server processing component 315 will modify information as dictated by any of the filters defined to the proxy server 300. These filters, i.e., filter rules and servlets, are modular and can be plugged into the proxy server by defining a response or request filter rule and defining it to the appropriate rule component. The filter servlet associated with the filter rule is then defined to proxy server processing component.

The proxy server processing may also perform other functions in addition to applying the filer servlet. These other functions include logging the responses and requests as well as caching the filtered responses that are received by the server process for quick retrieval. Caching provides a benefit in the case where another client requests the same information, the retrieval time is reduced because information can be retrieved from the cache instead of sending another request to the server process. In the instances where responses are cached, it is preferable cache the response after it has been filtered. Caching filtered responses prevents the proxy server from having to filter a response again, even though it is retrieved from the cache.

While Fig. 3 depicts one client process, one server process, and one proxy server, it should be recognized by one skilled in the art that there may be multiple client processes connected to a proxy server and that there may also be multiple proxy servers chained together to filter the requests and responses from the client and server processes. In addition, there may be multiple server processes that the client process is accessing through a network. While the network is not shown in Fig. 3, it should also be recognized by one skilled in the art that the focus of the present invention is that the proxy server processes information coming from the client to the server, and vice versa. A network may be located between the client process and proxy server, the proxy server and server process or anywhere in between the client and server processes.

Fig. 4 is a flow chart of the high level steps involved with forward and reverse

filtering. Forward filtering, as stated above, is defined as filtering performed on an outbound request from a client process. Conversely, reverse filtering is defined as filtering performed on inbound responses from the server process destined for the client process. The process begins by receiving a request by the client for information 5 from the server processor (Step 400). In one embodiment of the present invention, the server process is a web server and the client process is a computer connected to the Internet trying to access information using a web browser.

Following retrieval of the request, systems and methods consistent with the present invention then apply a forward filter to the request (Step 405). The forward 10 filter, for example, may remove any security information that a business does not want sent outside of the business domain. In response to receiving the request, the server process generates a response to the request to be sent back to the client process. A response, for example, may include a document requested by the client process from a Web server. The proxy server then receives this response satisfying this 15 request (Step 410).

In one embodiment, the response was previously received from the server and placed in a cache accessible by the proxy server. When the response has been placed in the cache, it is directly sent to the client process without initiating another request to the server process, thereby speeding up retrieving time. It is preferable that 20 timestamping be used to prevent the sending of old cached responses to the client. Timestamping is recognized by those skilled in the art as the process of removing old data that has expired, yet still remains in the cache. In addition, it is preferable to filter responses prior to caching them, thereby allowing the proxy server to send the filtered response directly to the client process without having to go through the 25 filtering process again.

In the event the response is not in cache, then after receiving the response from the server process, systems and methods consistent with the present invention then apply the reverse filtering to the response (Step 415). Similar to forward filtering, reverse filtering can modify the information that is contained in the response.

30 Parameter modification to make the information operative in the client process's

environment or removal of objectionable information are examples of reverse filtering.

Following the application of the reverse filter, the filtered response is then sent to the client for its usage (Step 420). This filtered response satisfies the requirements
5 of the domain containing the proxy server by filtering out and/or modifying information the domain, as defined in the filters. After sending the response to the client process, the proxy server may perform "post-processing" on the filtered response (Step 425). It is here, for example, where the proxy server may cache the filtered response. In addition, other administrative functions may be performed such
10 as the logging of the requests and responses that have passed through the proxy server.

Fig. 5 is a flow chart depicting the steps to filter a request or response in a manner consistent with the exemplary embodiment of the present invention. Fig. 5 depicts the detailed steps that were described generally in Fig. 4, Steps 405 and 415. Following the reception of a request or response, systems and methods consistent with
15 the present invention identify the URL, or domain, in the request or response (Step 505). In one embodiment of the present invention, the client is submitting a request to a web server and, in answering that request, the web server will transmit a response. Both the request and the response will indicate a URL for the client and server processes. The systems and methods consistent with the present invention utilize this
20 information to determine whether this request or response should be filtered. Therefore, following the identification of the URL in the response or request, the system and methods consistent with the present invention then proceed to determine if a filter exists for the identified URL (Step 510).

When a filter is created and added to a proxy server (described in more detail
25 with respect to Fig. 6), the proxy server is given a filter rule that identifies a URL to be filtered and to apply the filter to a request or response. This listing of URL's can be maintained in a table, database or any other data structure that can be used to perform a lookup function. When the systems and methods consistent with the present invention receive a request or a response, the server process URL information is
30 retrieved. Using this URL information, the systems and methods consistent with the

present invention then compare this against all the filter rules that have been defined to the proxy server.

After comparing the URL information against the filter rules, and determining that a filter is defined for the response or request, systems and methods consistent

5 with the present invention then proceed to apply a filter to the response or request as defined by instructions in the filter servlet associated with the filter rule (Step 515). These instructions, when executed, will modify the request or response in some manner as dictated by the filter servlet. After the filter is applied to the request or response, the filtered information is then passed along to either the client in the case of
10 a response, or the server in the case of a request (Step 520).

Fig. 6 is a flow chart depicting the steps required to add a filter to a proxy server in a manner consistent with an exemplary embodiment of the present invention.

One of the advantages of the present invention is the ability to "plug in" various filters into the proxy server without having to develop all new software for the proxy server.

15 This allows local system administrators to tailor a proxy server that will filter desired information specific to a domain. Systems and methods consistent with the present invention add a filter to the proxy server by creating a filter servlet (Step 600). The servlet is a set of instructions, associated with the filter rule, that when executed performs the modification on the request or response to satisfy the system
20 administrator's requirements.

A filter rule is then created (Step 605), which will trigger the execution of a filter servlet. The filter rule is an identification of the domains, e.g., URL's, that the instructions created in the filter servlet in Step 600 are to be applied to. For example, the user may indicate a number of web addresses, or URL's, that are of particular

25 concern from a security stand point and may define these URL's, as filter rules, to the proxy server. When a request or a response containing URL's is received by the proxy server, a test is executed to determine if the received URL matches one of the predefined filter rules. If a match is established, then the filter servlet that is associated with the matched filter rule is executed and applied to the request or
30 response.

After creation of the filter servlet and the filter rule, systems and methods consistent with the present invention then identify the new filter rule to the proxy server (Step 610). While the system administrator has created the filter rule and servlet to protect or modify the information that enters into its domain, these filters need to be defined to the proxy server in order to be operable. When identifying the filter to the proxy server, it is preferable that the filter rules are placed in a list with other filter rules, such that the proxy server can compare a retrieved URL with all the filter rules to be filtered.

Next the filter rule is identified to the proxy server as applying to either a request or response (Step 615). This will prevent the proxy server from inadvertently applying a filter to a response when it should be applied to a request or vice versa.

Finally, the location of the filter servlet is identified to the proxy server (Step 620).

This may be performed by placing the filter servlet at the same location as all the other filter servlets. Placing all the filter servlets at the same location prevents the proxy server from having to search for the desired filter servlet. However, there are many software designs that provide for identifying one piece of code to another, such as maintaining a database wherein a pointer is used for location information. Providing the proxy server with the location of the filter servlet is an implementation choice and the various implementation schemes to provide this function are considered within the scope of the present invention.

Conclusion

Systems and methods to filter information between a client and a server process in a manner consistent with the present invention thus facilitates the tailoring of filters to satisfy the needs of a specific domain. By allowing plug-in filters, users can, easily and dynamically, modify what requests and responses get filtered in addition to what type of information is filtered from the requests and responses. Furthermore, by caching the filtered responses, significant increases in processing time is achieved for those client processes requesting the same information.

The foregoing description of an implementation of the invention has been presented for purposes of illustration and description. It is not exhaustive and does not limit the invention to the precise form disclosed. Modifications and variations are possible in light of the above teachings or may be acquired from practicing of the invention. For example, the described implementation includes software but systems and methods consistent with the present invention may be implemented as a combination of hardware and software or in hardware alone. The invention may be implemented with both object-oriented and non-object-oriented programming systems. Additionally, although aspects of the present invention are described for being stored in memory, one skilled in the art will appreciate that these aspects can also be stored on other types of computer-readable media, such as secondary storage devices, like hard disks, floppy disks, or CD-ROM; a carrier wave from the Internet or other propagation medium; or other forms of RAM or ROM. The scope of the invention is defined by the claims and their equivalents.

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A method of filtering information from a first process to a second process, comprising the steps of:
 - receiving the information from the first process;
 - selecting a filter to apply to the information received by the first process;
 - applying the filter to the information by modifying the information based on instructions contained in the filter; and
 - transmitting the modified information to the second process.
2. The method of Claim 1, wherein the first process is a client process, the information is a request and the second process is a server process.
3. The method of Claim 2, wherein the step of modifying the information includes removing security data from the information.
4. The method of Claim 1, wherein the first process is a server process, the second process is a client process, the information is a response and the modified information is a modified response.
5. The method of Claim 4 further comprising the step of caching the modified response.
6. The method of Claim 1, wherein the second process is a Web server and the step of selecting a filter to apply to the information comprises the steps of:
 - defining a first Uniform Resource Locator (URL) and an associated filter;
 - retrieving a second URL from the information; and
 - in the event the first URL matches the second URL, selecting the filter associated with the defined URL to apply to the information.
7. The method of Claim 1, further comprising the step of adding a plug-in filter.
8. The method of Claim 7, wherein the filter applied to the information is the plug-in filter.

9. A method of filtering information from a first process to a second process by a proxy server, comprising the steps of:
 - defining a Uniform Resource Locator (URL) as a filter rule and an associated filter servlet;
 - receiving the information from the first process, the information containing a URL; and
 - in the event the URL in the information matches the URL in the filter rule, selecting the filter servlet associated with the defined URL to apply to the information;
 - applying the filter servlet to the information by modifying the information based on instructions contained in the filter servlet, and transmitting the modified information to the second process.
10. The method of Claim 9, wherein the first process is a client process, the information is a request and the second process is a server process.
11. The method of Claim 10, wherein the step of modifying the information includes removing security data from the information.
12. The method of Claim 9, wherein the first process is a server process, the second process is a client process, the information is a response and the modified information is a modified response.
13. The method of Claim 12 further comprising the step of caching the modified response.
14. The method of Claim 1, further comprising the step of adding a plug-in filter by defining another filter rule and another filter servlet to the proxy server.
15. A method of filtering information using a proxy server, comprising the steps of:
 - receiving a request from a client process;
 - applying a forward filter to the request;
 - transmitting the filtered request to a server process;
 - receiving a response from the server process related to the filtered request;

applying a reverse filter to the response; and
transmitting the filtered response to the client.

16. The method of Claim 15, wherein the second process is a Web server and the step of applying the forward filter comprises the steps of:

defining a Uniform Resource Locator (URL) and an associated filter;
and

filtering the request using the associated filter in the event the defined URL is contained in the request.

17. The method of Claim 15, wherein the second process is a Web server and the step of applying the reverse filter comprises the steps of:

defining a Uniform Resource Locator (URL) and an associated filter;
and

filtering the request using the associated filter in the event the defined URL is contained in the response.

18. The method of Claim 15 further comprising the step of caching the modified response.

19. The method of Claim 15, further comprising the step of adding a plug-in filter.

20. The method of Claim 19, wherein the filter applied to the information is the plug-in filter.

21. A method of adding filters to a proxy server, comprising the steps of:
creating the proxy server operative to receive filters;
creating a filter having a filter rule and a filter servlet;
adding the filter to the proxy server, wherein the proxy server is
operative to modify information using the added filter.

22. The method of Claim 21, wherein the filter rule comprises a Uniform Resource Locator (URL) and the filter servlet contains instructions that when executed modify the information.

23. The method of Claim 21 further comprising the step of adding multiple filters to the proxy server.

24. A data processing system for filtering information from a first process to a second process by a proxy server comprising:

a central processing unit;

an operating system; and

a memory containing instructions that when executed perform the steps of:

defining a Uniform Resource Locator (URL) as a filter rule and an associated filter servlet,

receiving the information from the first process, the information containing a URL, and

when the URL in the information matches the URL in the filter rule,

selecting the filter servlet associated with the defined URL to apply to the information,

applying the filter servlet to the information by modifying the information based on instructions contained in the filter servlet, and transmitting the modified information to the second process.

25. A computer-readable medium containing computer-executable instructions for filtering information from a first process to a second process to perform a method, comprising the steps of:

receiving the information from the first process;

selecting a filter to apply to the information received by the first process;

applying the filter to the information by modifying the information based on instructions contained in the filter; and transmitting the modified information to the second process.

26. A method of filtering information from a first process to a second process, comprising the steps of:

means for receiving the information from the first process;

means for selecting a filter to apply to the information received by the first process;

means for applying the filter to the information by modifying the information based on instructions contained in the filter; and

means for transmitting the modified information to the second process.

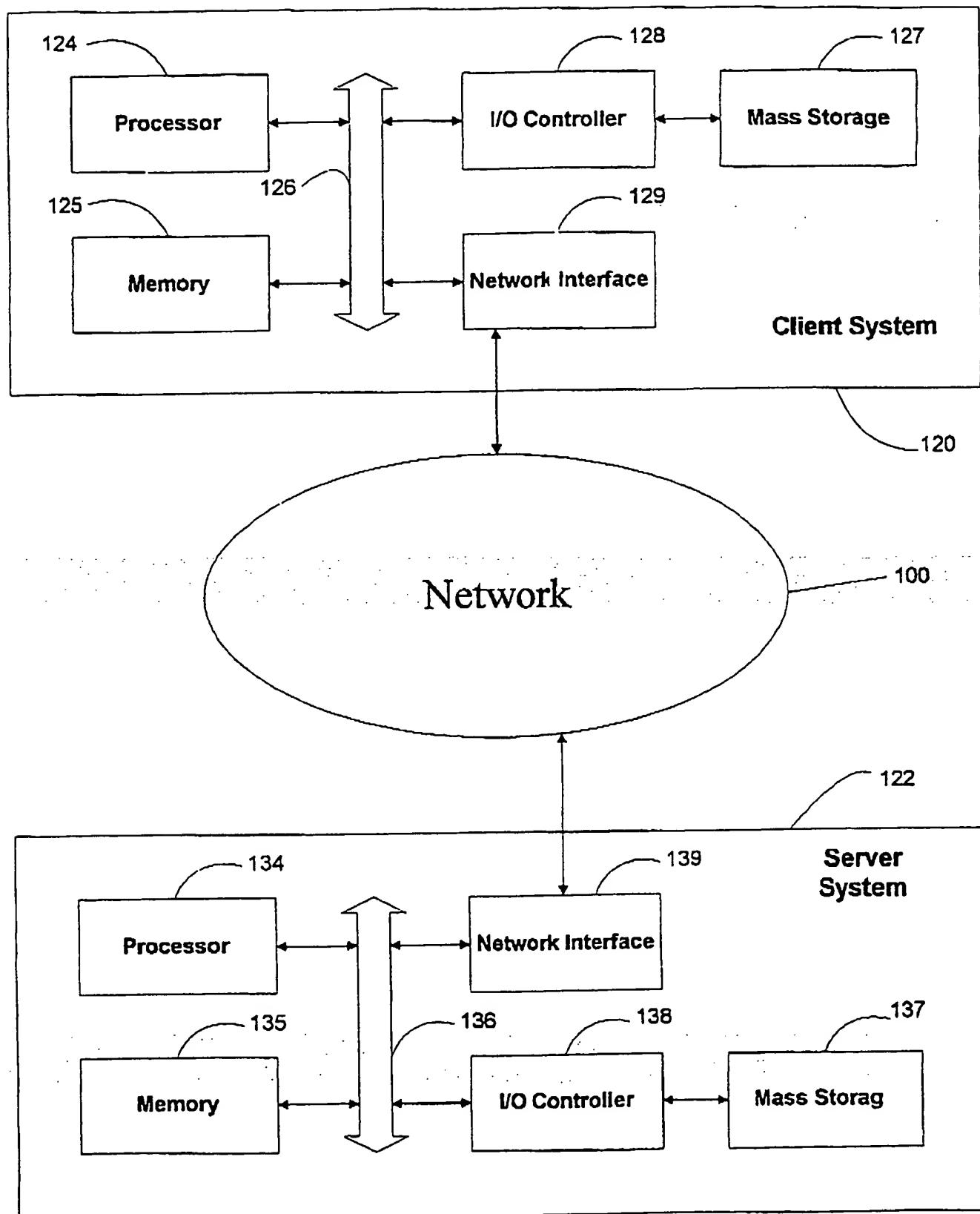


FIG. 1

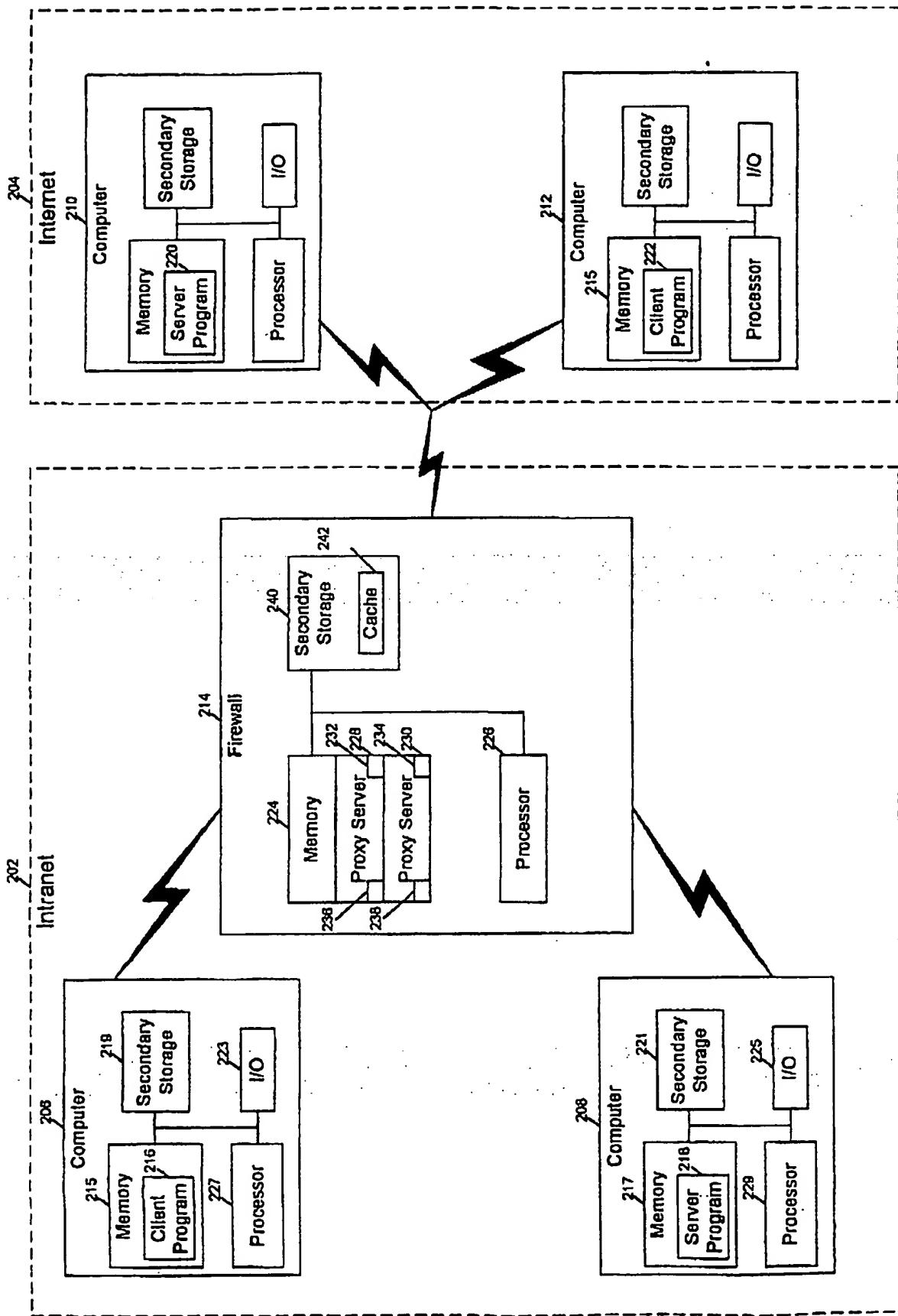


Fig. 2
200

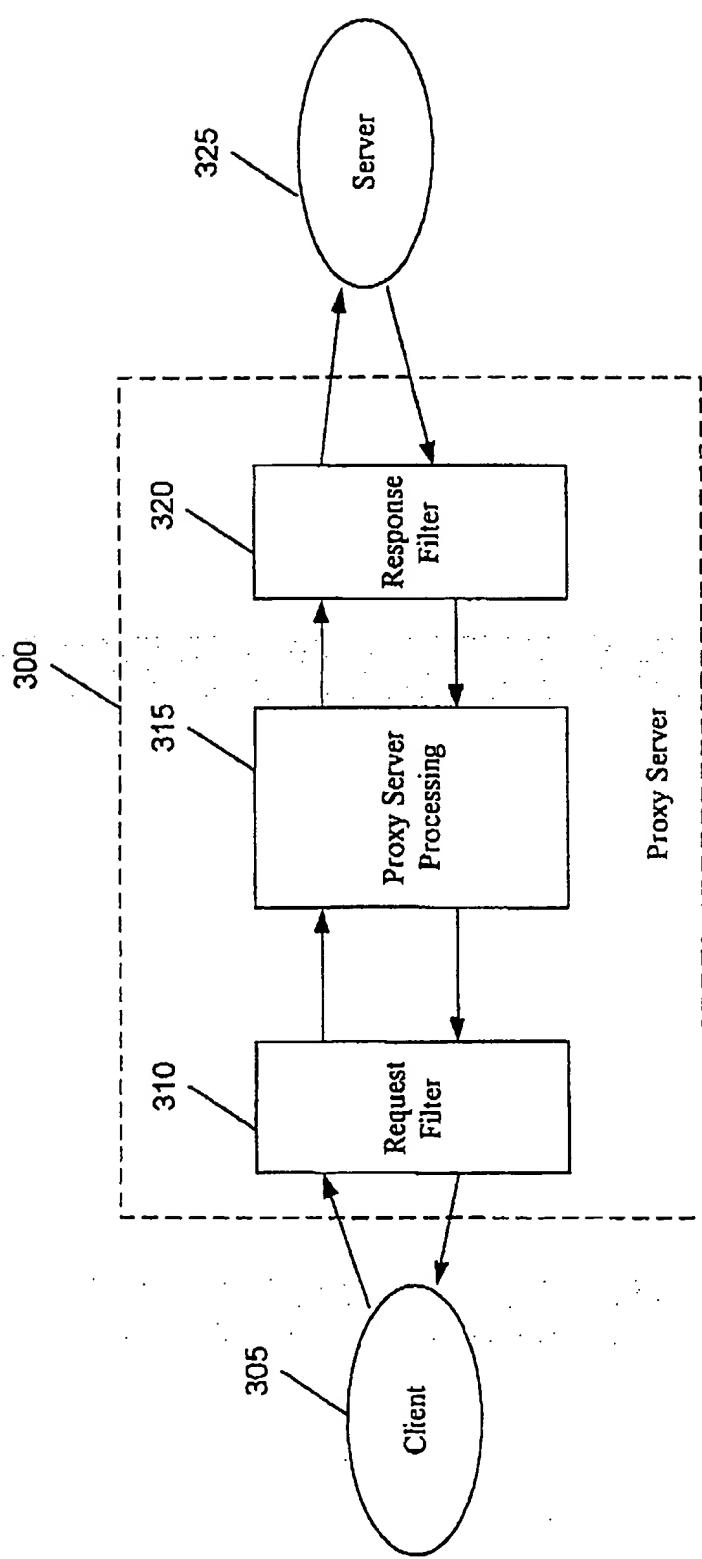


Fig. 3

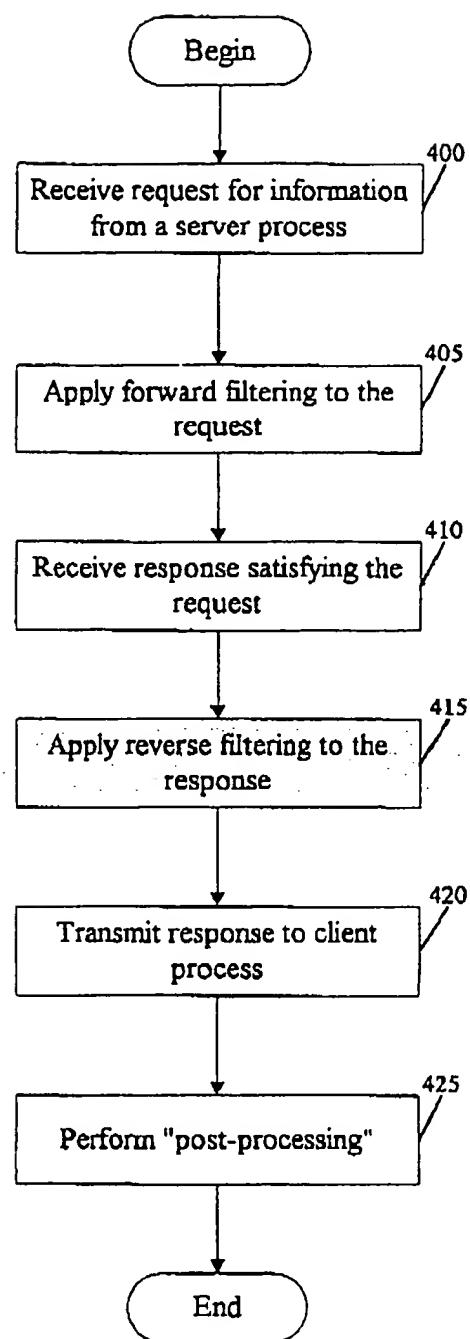


Fig. 4

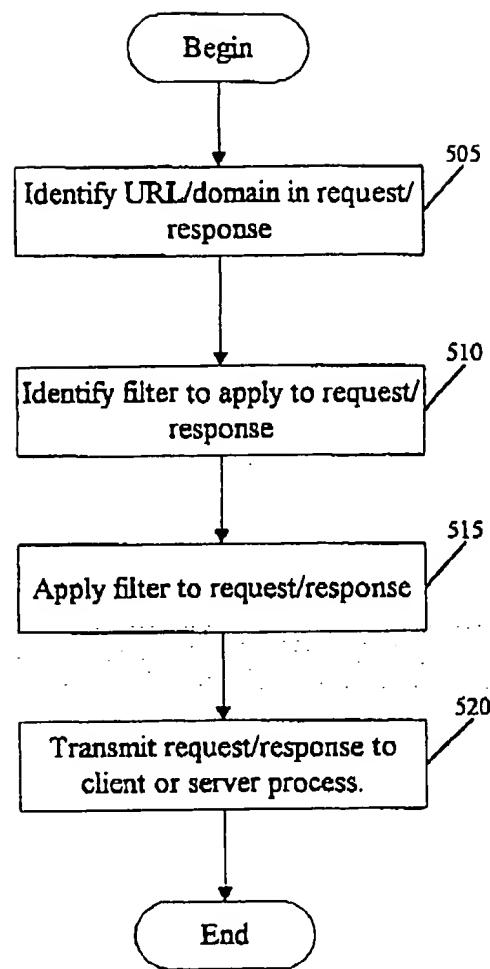


Fig. 5

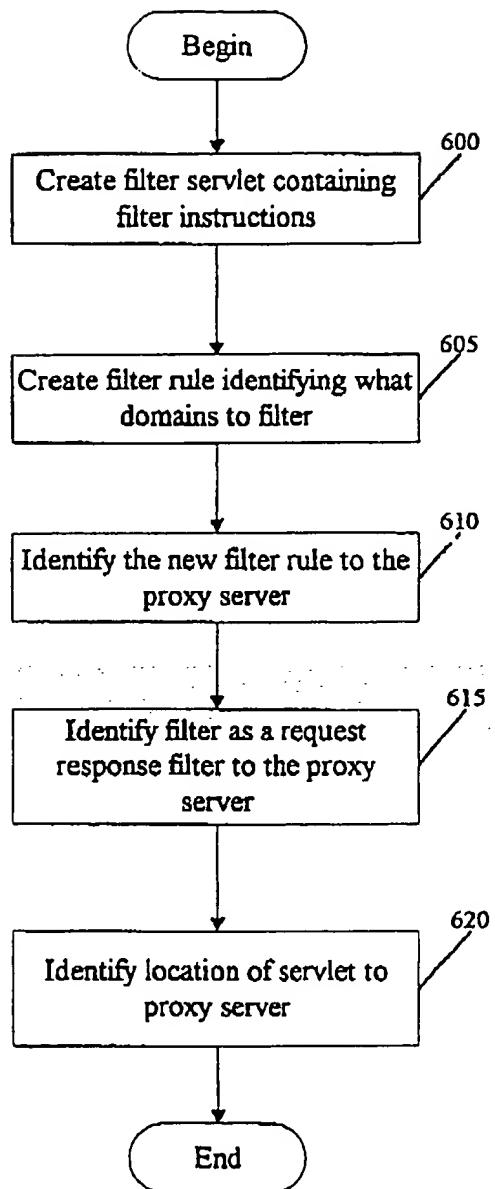


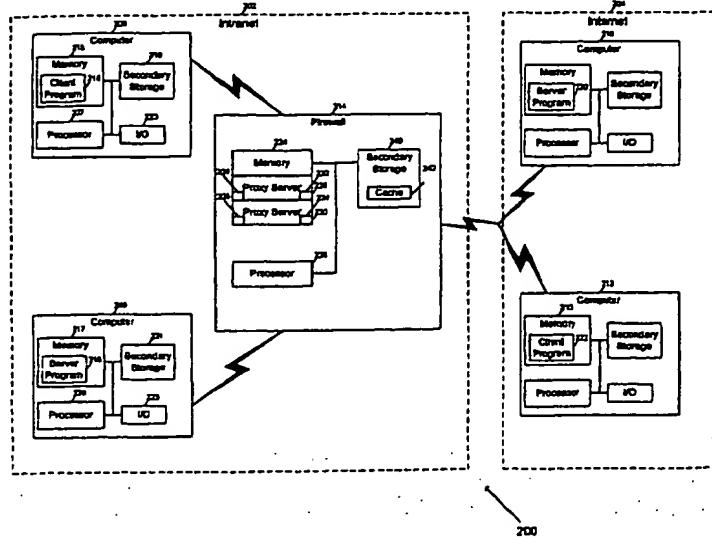
Fig. 6



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(54) Title: SCALABLE PROXY SERVERS WITH PLUG IN FILTERS



(57) Abstract

A proxy server (228) operative to accept plug-in filters to perform forward and reverse filtering between a client process (210) and a server process (208). In accordance with one aspect of the invention, a method of filtering information includes the steps of receiving a request by the proxy server (228) from a client (210). The proxy server (228) identifies a Uniform Resource Locator (URL) of a server process (208) in the request and compares that URL against filter rules previously defined to the system. In the event the URL satisfies one of the filter rules, a filter servlet associated with the satisfied filter rule is used to filter the requested information. A filter servlet is a set of instructions that, when executed, filters the information. The filtered request is then used to retrieve information from a server process (208). Similarly, the same filtering process may be performed on a response from the server process (208) destined for a client process (210).

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INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No.

PCT/US99/13876

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER

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According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC

B. FIELDS SEARCHED

Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)

U.S. : 709/225,229; 713/201

Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched

Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practicable, search terms used)

STN: Compendex, Inspec, Uspatfull

search terms: firewall, proxy, filter, URL, security

C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
Y,P	US 5,805,820 A (BELLOVIN et al) 08 September 1998, col. 4, lines 40-65, col. 9, lines 6-43, col. 7, line 1 - col. 8, line 53.	1-26
Y,P	US 5,835,726 A (SHWED et al) 10 November 1998, col. 5, line 39 - col. 8, line 40, col. 9, line 1 - col. 11, line 13.	1-26
A,P	US 5,884,025 A (BAEHR et al) 16 March 1999, col. 1, line 1 - col. 2, line 49.	1-26
A,P	US 5,864,666 A (SHRADER) 26 January 1999, col. 1, line 6 - col. 2, line 9, col. 8, line 20 - col. 9, line 3.	1-26

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